

Sermon

February 4 and 5, 2006

Mark 1:29-39 (especially 35)

**In the morning,
while it was still very dark,
Jesus got up
and went out to a deserted place,
and there he prayed.**

People were all around,
clamoring for his attention.
He was healing people.
“The whole city was gathered around the door.”
He had more to do
than time to do it.
And what did Jesus do?
How did he start his day?
Where did he begin to serve?

He began in prayer.

C.S. Lewis said this:

**The moment you wake up each morning,
all your wishes and hopes for the day
rush at you like wild animals.
And the first job each morning
consists in shoving it all back;
in listening to that other voice,
taking that other point of view,
letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life
come flowing in.**

Martin Luther said:

**I am so busy now
that if I did not spend 2 or 3 hours each day in prayer,
I would not get through the day.**

I have a challenge for you this week.
I'd like to encourage you to spend some quiet time in prayer.
Listening to God's voice.
Gaining God's perspective for the day.

If this is something you already do—
—then just keep doing what you're doing.
If not,
it's an opportunity to experience
a time of quiet prayer.

It can be in the morning,
as you begin your day.
But it doesn't have to be.
For me it really helps if it's at a time
when distractions are at a minimum.
For some of you,
that can be tricky.
Especially if there are little ones around.
But look for that time,
when there is nothing to distract you.
And then spend some time—
—maybe 15 minutes,
maybe more,
maybe less—
—listening and talking to God.

One of the challenges I have
when I set apart time for devotion and prayer,
is that I fill it up.
I'm more comfortable "doing something"
than listening.
So, I do helpful things—
—reading the Bible
—reading devotional books.
But sometimes the hard thing, for me anyway,
is to spend quiet time,
listening and talking to God.

And partially that's hard,
because God is an invisible God.
And even though we believe God's always with us,
we can't see or hear him
in the same way we see and hear people.

So take some time,
with as few distractions as possible,
for an amount of time that works for you,
at a time of day that works for you,
at least once this week,
to spend time in prayer.

And then,
as you get together,
in Sunday School classes,
or Small Groups,
or Choir,
or meetings,
or Bible Studies,
or with family.
As you meet together in the next couple of weeks,
talk about your experience with prayer.
What is it you shared with God?
How did you hear God speaking to you?
What was the experience like?
What do you wonder?
What questions do you have?

In Luke 11, it says:
**He (Jesus) was praying in a certain place,
and after he had finished,
one of his disciples said to him,
“Lord, teach us to pray.”**

That's my prayer for us.
Lord, teach us to pray.

Sometimes we think we should just know how to pray.
And sometimes it is that simple.
Because prayer is as simple as talking to a friend.
But it's also something that we can continue to learn about.
Continue to grow in.
Lord, teach us to pray.

So, this week,
follow the example of Jesus.
Find some quiet time and place to pray.
And then talk about that prayer
with one another.

And prayer can make it clear to us
how we are to follow Jesus.
How we are to serve.
And give us strength for the journey.
Grace for the day.

A little boy and his dad
were walking along the road,
when they came across a large rock.
The boy looked at that rock,
and said to his dad:
“Do you think,
if I use all my strength,
I can move that rock?”

The father thought a moment and said:
“I think,
if you use all your strength,
you can do it.”

So the little boy ran over to the rock,
and began to push...
...and push...
...and push...
And the rock didn't move an inch.
Not a bit.

And he slumped down on the ground,
exhausted and dejected.
And he said to his Dad,
"You were wrong, Dad.
I can't do it."

His father walked over to him,
knelt beside him,
put his arm around the boy's shoulder.
And said,
"You can do it.
You just didn't use all your strength.
You didn't ask me to help."

Sometimes things seem so overwhelming.
We feel like we just can't do it.
Like the troubles of our world,
or the troubles of our day,
are just too much for us.

They say that 60% of us here today
have a significant problem right now,
big enough that you can't see through to the end.
You can't envision a solution.

Divorce.
Abuse.
Broken Relationships.
Sickness.
Grief.

Our lives have pain,
hardship,
struggle.
But into that darkness and pain and despair,

there comes hope.
And hope has a name.
And his name is Jesus.

Jesus came to Simon's mother-in-law.
She was sick in bed with a fever.
And Jesus came to her,
and took her by the hand,
and lifted her up.
And the fever left her,
and she began to serve them.

Some people would say
that's just the way it is for women.
They're in bed with a fever,
and as soon as they're out of bed,
they're back to work.

But you know,
when you're sick,
it is such a joy to feel better.
To feel well enough to serve again.

And the word got around really fast.
As soon as the Sabbath was over,
at sundown,
Jesus was swamped.
They brought to him all who were sick,
and all who were possessed.
They wanted a miracle worker
And he had compassion on them.
And he healed them.

But then,

in the morning,
 Jesus went out to pray.
And when the disciples tracked him down
 and said
 (and I think it sounds like they were a little impatient with him),
they said,
 “Everyone’s looking for you.”
Don’t you know you ought to be back there,
 healing them,
 taking care of them.
You’re popular.
 They like you.
 And you’re making a real difference.

But Jesus said:
 “I think it’s time to move on.
 Let’s go on to the other towns,
 so that I may proclaim the message there also’
 for that is what I came out to do.”
And they went on.

Why?
 There were still a lot of people to heal.
 Jesus could have done plenty of miracles right there.
But what did Jesus come to do?
 Heal our bodies.
 Not only that.
 God came to do so much more than just heal our bodies.

Max Lucado said:
 “Sometimes God is so touched by what He sees,
 that he gives us what we need
 and not simply what we ask for.”

We want a quick fix.
 We want someone
 to swoop in and save us.
 To take away our troubles.

But God give us so much more.
 God comes among us.

To take our hand.
To walk with us in our pain.
 To guide us through life.
 To lead us to lives of justice and service.
To give us hope
 so we can share that hope with a world in need.

And so,
 like Simon's mother-in-law,
 with Jesus by our side,
we arise and serve.

Richard Selser,
 professor of surgery at Yale Medical School,
 tells a story of a beautiful young woman.
Who had a large, malignant tumor
 in her cheek.
And he had to operate.
 And to get all of the malignancy,
 to save her life
 from the spread of the cancer,
he had to cut a facial nerve,
 which left her with a crooked mouth.

And he tells,
 how in the evening,
 as the sun was going down,
 he was making his rounds.
She was out of recovery.
 He wanted to drop by her room
 and talk with her a moment.
 He walked into the room
 and into the shadow caused by the door.
And he realized he had stumbled on
 a moment of closeness and sharing
 between this woman and her young husband.

And he writes:
 "I knew I had intruded upon holy ground.

Who are these young people
that look at each other with such loving eyes?"

And he must have moved,
or she noticed some movement,
because she looked over her husband's shoulder,
straight at him and said:
"Dr. Selser,
will my mouth always be crooked like this?"

And he said,
"Yes, you're going to have a crooked mouth,
because I had to clip a nerve
to remove the tumor
to save your life
from the spread of the cancer."

Her husband,
it was as if the doctor wasn't even there.
As if he hadn't said a word.
He simply said,
"It's kind of cute."
And he bent down
to kiss her.

And as he kissed,
he twisted his mouth
to accommodate hers.
So that she would know
that the kiss they shared
still worked.

That's what God is like.
God in Christ took human form
to come to this earth
to show us
that the kiss still works.
Even when we're twisted with pain,
and the darkness of sin,
God's kiss still works.

This week,
as you spend quiet time with God,
know that God's love is there for you always.
And God lifts us up,
so we can serve.

In Jesus' name,
Amen